

*(Washington) - U.S. Rep. Rush Holt tonight spoke in favor of a House resolution decrying human rights violations and undemocratic elections in Burma. Holt is a member of the House Democracy Partnership and the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission. His remarks are below:*

I rise today to express my strong support for House Resolution 1677 and to denounce the flawed, undemocratic elections that took place in Burma on November 7, 2010. For nearly half a century, the liberties of the Burmese people have been held hostage by successive military rulers. The regime refused to honor the results of open elections held in recent decades and then forced the acceptance of a new, illegitimate constitution in a sham referendum. Last week, the junta once again chose to disregard the will of the Burmese people by staging a fraudulent election.

When I first visited Burma decades ago, I learned what a difference a misguided regime could make. Burma had been a vibrant country known as the “rice bowl of Asia.” It had a rich history, fertile land, abundant resources, and a productive population. In the years that followed the coup in the 1960s, the authoritarian regime impoverished a nation and brutalized a people. The generals have rejected the choices of Burmese citizens, imprisoned and killed political dissidents, and failed to address humanitarian suffering caused by their own mismanagement and caused by tragic natural disasters. The United States has a duty to stand firmly against the military’s human rights abuses and to work for justice, reconciliation, and the rule of law in Burma.

I join with those around the world celebrating the recent release from house arrest of Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, who has led the nonviolent struggle for democratic reforms in Burma at great personal sacrifice for over two decades. The outpouring of support and affection for her is a clear signal that the spirit of liberty endures among the Burmese people. Yet we must be mindful of history’s lessons. The military junta will not tolerate actions that threaten its iron grip on power. That is why the United States must continue to pressure the regime to end its repressive practices and to accept an immediate transition toward a more democratic government that respects human rights and respects the aspirations of the Burmese people. I urge my colleagues to support this resolution

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